

## HIGHER VET AND LEVEL 5

Our feedback on:  
*A report of the ET 2020 Working Group on VET  
on Innovation and Digitalisation*

+

Input for two new thematic teams

+

A call for members of both teams

+

On our way to the Annual Conference

### ***Why this newsletter...***

In December last year, an interesting report from the European Commission was published about the ET2020 Working Group on Vocational Education and Training (the document can be found on our website). The document contains a number of relevant and useful recommendations for the VET sector, especially when it is about to developments around 'innovation' and 'digitalization', linked to: 'eight insights for pioneering new approaches'.

When it comes to our 'community of practice', it is especially important to consider how, on the international level, so from the European perspective, the possibilities are for all kinds of qualifications that fall under Higher VET (also within our approach referred to as Vocational-Professional Education (VPE)). The relationship with other sectors is a crucial element in this, especially when it comes to aspects such as throughput and permeability. That is why we went through the report to see what is stated and recommended with regard to this - and what can be used within CHAIN5.

### ***Two new thematic teams***

As indicated in the December newsletter, the intention is to create two new thematic teams:

1. A thematic group whose members consult on issues at European level. This mainly concerns the strategy, policy and the possibilities that exist within the international context for the use of qualifications at level 5 of the EQF and their deployment within the European Education (and Training) Area for (flexible) learning pathways.  
In this way the members can make a contribution to the European process around level 5. But they also have the opportunity to use the experience gained for their own national strategy if there are comparable developments.
2. A thematic group whose members are representing national networks involved in the role that level 5 plays in the national context and may play in the future. This may concern members of those national (or possibly regional) networks who wish to consult with each other about the experiences gained, the available expertise and the possibilities to give level 5 a further 'boost'. This makes it possible to give substance to the international cooperation as envisaged within CHAIN5.

Further information was provided in that previous newsletter, so we can refer to that document.

*We would like to ask anyone interested in one of these theme groups to send an email to [daale@chain5.net](mailto:daale@chain5.net), and indicate which group it concerns.*

*It is a non-binding 'action', so there are no obligations at this moment. Everyone who shows his or her interest will receive a confirmation.*

### ***Analysing the report, also for a webinar for the new TTs - and their goals***

So in this newsletter we will analyze this report on VET on the basis of the paragraphs relating to level 5 and higher. Then it mainly concerns Higher VET (VPE) and the possibilities that exist and must continue to progress to a higher level by obtaining a diploma and/or degree, also within another sector or with the use of non-formal training and education, and therefore certificates.

It is also about exploring the possibilities that we as CHAIN5 have to get started with this, increasing the support base at local, regional, national and European level. But it is also mainly about being able to make more use of each other's knowledge and expertise that has been built up in recent years within a national approach. For this we have already some thematic teams that are involved in substantive matters, for practitioners, teachers, coordinators, staff members and everyone else involved in offering qualifications at level 5.

The analysis is mainly intended to be used with the two new TTs, as described separately above (and which was also discussed in the previous newsletter). With this we can show what is going on, what can be discussed by a TT and how CHAIN5 can subsequently contribute to the discussions at national and European level.

That means:

- We are going to put together the two teams based on the registrations.
- Meetings are scheduled for both teams, online, for mid-February, so we are sending further information to the members of the TTs.
- Based on these consultations, the most important developments and topics are identified for a session during the Annual Conference (11-12 March), and about which separate newsletters are published.

If there are any questions about this, you can send a message to [daale@chain5.net](mailto:daale@chain5.net).

For the record: Of course we will 'translate' all this into practical matters, useful for institutions and regional or national networks. But that always requires 'frameworks' and 'formats'. To adapt and update them for specific matters, governments and other organizations often look at other member states to see what can be used - also when it comes to internationalization, cooperation across borders. That is also where the strength of our community of practice lies ...

### ***Review of the document***

Below we provide a number of relevant parts from the report, of importance to CHAIN5 when it comes to international developments around level 5. This concerns European policy, as a possible basis for an adjustment of a national approach.

We comment on those parts – they are always listed in a box – combined with suggestions. These should be seen as examples of topics that can be discussed in both thematic teams. Of course with its own approach, given the options available to CHAIN5 to get started within our community.

### ***Listing keywords for the thematic teams***

For each part it is indicated to what extent it can be used for the thematic teams, by saying something about it, based on a number of 'keywords':

**TT-1** - European level

**TT-2** - National level.

## **1 Looking at the role of Higher VET**

Let's start with our first part of the report, chosen by uw, about the need for more qualifications at a higher level, not being part of the (European) Higher Education Area.

### ***Higher skills and higher VET***

Higher VET has a key role to play in the supply of higher skills that are increasingly needed in European economies and is also well placed to be a focal point for driving quality and excellence, with great potential to take part in the activities described in the section above on Centres of Vocational Excellence.

It is unquestionable that more attention is needed for qualifications and the associated learning outcomes at level 5 and higher of the EQF. In recent years, and certainly with the current economic

developments, it is important for many companies and organizations, and therefore for students, learners and workers, to have the opportunity to have training available at those levels. This is without doubt about having flexible learning paths that are qualitatively without any discussions.

It is also necessary, for example, that for certain courses that fall under Higher VET, the excellence is considered, so that it is partly about the unique character of certain qualifications that are offered. These can contribute to the shaping of the regional economy, to make the business community there more and more competitive in a stronger global cooperation and especially competition.

To this end, institutions for VET and therefore Higher VET can strive to be a Center of Vocational Excellence (CoVE), with a subsidy from the European Commission. That concerns being excellent on a particular theme. CoVEs are also available in different countries and they can work together to learn from each other and experience resp. share the results of research with other stakeholders.

By the way, just to mention: In the past two years, the position of qualifications that fall under Higher VET has been examined. It has emerged that having its own sector for level 5 and higher justifies its own name and 'character'. We have already addressed this in other documents, partly as a result of the conference that was held together with EfVET in December 2019.

A sector for Vocational-Professional Education (VPE – an international common name in English) can establish itself in parallel with other sectors and areas, to offer even more opportunities to many people who benefit from training strongly related to the labour market and jobs out there and to be developed. See also the next part of the report, mentioned below.

**TT-1:** CoVEs and SCHE, in view of the European Universities / European Education Area / sector for VPE / Common names / Excellence

**TT-2:** Possibilities for cooperation between international networks around CoVEs, whereby the relevant theme is also dealt with courses at level 5 / binary approach: VET and HE / national strategy for LLL and Higher VET

***Attractiveness: More VET at higher levels in national systems***

More generally, it can increase the attractiveness of VET by opening up opportunities for learners to progress via VET to the highest levels of educational attainment. The 2020 proposal for a council recommendation on VET recommends that EU Member States further develop higher VET programmes at EQF levels 5 to 8 to support a growing need for higher vocational skills as well as innovation and smart specialisation, including modularising VET programmes and expanding them to higher levels of qualifications and micro-credentials; it also calls for greater permeability and transparency.

It is emphasized that it is also the option for many young people to pursue training through the VET sector at higher levels within a national education system. It may be the case that the only option is to (subsequently) switch within the formal process to a higher education programme (i.e. programmes that fall under the agreements within the EHEA, with all the associated instruments).

However, this recommendation also states that there are circumstances, in view of the interests of learners and also, for example, the labour market, to look for the establishment of parallel learning pathways alongside 'formal higher education'. This can be done by developing and offering qualifications that can be positioned at level 5 or higher. There are no international agreements for this yet, but it is possible to have a qualification linked in a member state to a level of the national framework and therefore indirectly to the EQF. If the form in which the training is provided is in line with what is customary for the VET qualifications up to and including level 4, this could be HVET – VPE as a proposed common name.

It is absolutely clear that more use can and will then be made of specialist programmes within the education sector that is thus created. The use of smaller units in these programmes, with micro-credentials and certificates, is also necessary, partly because of their importance for the business community in a rapidly changing economy.

**TT-1:** Looking at the sector for VPE / multi-level cooperation / European strategy and support / Bologna Process

**TT-2:** Subject in a national context: yes, no / learning from each other / modularization / RPL / current situation

### *Looking at the Renewed Agenda for HE*

There is no doubt that VET is ideally positioned to respond to some of the critical challenges of our times. As noted in the Renewed EU Agenda for Higher Education:

- too many students graduate from general/ academic higher education with poor basic skills (literacy, numeracy, digital) and without the range of transversal skills (problem solving, communication, etc.) they need for resilience in a changing world;
- people from disadvantaged socio-economic or migrant backgrounds remain far less likely to enter and complete higher education; academics and graduates are too often perceived as detached from the rest of society; and
- higher education should allow students to acquire skills and experiences through activities based on real-world problems, including work-based learning and, where possible, offer international mobility. Cooperation with employers can allow HEIs to increase the relevance of their curricula and deliver them effectively and increase opportunities for students to access high quality work-based learning.
- In light of this, consideration should be given to how far higher VET has already developed and what remains to be done. Higher VET (generally encompassing vocationally oriented education and training at levels 5 to 8 of the European Qualifications Framework) has seen an expansion and diversification in European countries over the last two decades, with rises in participation, new separate strands added to higher education and new forms of pedagogy, programmes and qualifications introduced. There has been a notable expansion in many countries in 'short cycle VET degrees' at EQF level 5 which provide a significant upskilling function. On-the-job learning has also been increasingly integrated into vocationally oriented education and training at higher levels and in different ways, either in the form of internships as part of programmes or as new formats of dual or apprenticeship training.

It is indicated that formal higher education should focus more than now on offering units that explicitly relate to what is needed in the labour market and that is important for the careers of workers. The use of work-based learning is an option that should certainly be seized.

But this also provides the impetus for a discussion that on the one hand is extremely necessary to see how more young people will opt for vocational training and education, but on the other hand will also arouse resistance from other target groups because they often support the idea of get as many young people as possible to follow 'formal higher education' - and preferably at a University. So it will mean that a good discussion is needed, without 'getting on each other's toes'.

The aim is to build a system whereby the learning pathways via vocational education at levels up to and including 4 are to be followed by VPE courses at the higher levels - i.e. higher but parallel to formal higher education within the national context.

So, it can be argued, it is therefore good to first consider whether the institutions for higher education can change their approach, as stated above in the box, or whether the national governments will ensure that opportunities come through such a parallel system that has more characteristics of the provision by VET providers.

In our view, it is necessary to prevent non-transparent situations from arising, including through the use of concepts that 'resemble each other' for both sectors. For example, it concerns the use of the term 'higher' and then its use for 'higher *education*' and also 'higher *levels*'. But also having 'short cycle VET degrees' in addition to the 'Short Cycle Higher Education' is not useful, because the names then resemble each other but do not mean the same (and the terms 'cycle' and 'degree' are now once attached to the European Higher Education Area).

**TT-1:** Can we look for reasons for this, for an EU policy / doing research / use of names, concepts, definitions and instruments... / projects

**TT-2:** Is it useful to have two systems next to each other, with their own characteristics / should agreements be made about the cooperation between HEIs and VPE-Colleges / transfer / flexible learning paths / use of RPL, etc.

*Footnote at the definition by Cedefop for Higher VET  
(given in this report)*

This is the definition developed in the recently completed Cedefop project on the changing nature and role of vocational education and training in Europe. Looking across Europe, the study found that vocationally oriented education and training at higher levels 'is not clearly defined in most cases, is usually not considered as a sector on its own, and there is often an overlap with continuing vocational education and training (CVET) or higher education (HE).'

(Cedefop (2019). The changing nature and role of vocational education and training in Europe. Volume 6: vocationally oriented education and training at higher education level. Expansion and diversification in European countries.)

The comment in the report based on the findings of Cedefop (mainly seen as a research and consultancy organization for VET) is emphatically in line with what we have stated above. There is now an unclear situation regarding the positioning of the qualifications that are offered from the VET viewpoint at the higher levels.

First of all, there is an overlap with the range of programmes and courses that are mainly non-formal and are aimed at workers and companies that want to offer training and education - that is, under the name CVET. This is a concept for naming the more non-formal qualifications provided by VET Colleges and Institutes as an extension of the regular and formal courses up to and including level 4 of the EQF.

Subsequently, it is established that there are national education systems in which Higher VET can also be found in a formal sense at 5 and higher and where it is not clear to everyone where the boundary with Higher Education lies. This may mean that common instruments are used, but not all of them, as is the case with the courses within the EHEA, as a requirement to be qualified as formal higher education in the international setting and context.

All this is therefore an additional reason to consider in the coming period, possibly with input from CHAIN5, whether it is possible to set up a transparent system for the three types of training mentioned, each with its own characteristics, instruments and learning pathways. It must then be possible to determine how the boundaries between the subsectors can be defined. It is then also our task to consider how to collaborate in offering learning lines where the 'boundaries are exceeded'.

**TT-1:** Investigate the state of affairs / possibilities to enter into discussions

**TT-2:** Inventory of national and regional situations / need for this transparency / role of providers, government and other stakeholders.

*Examples – in countries having a binary system for HE*

Most European countries operate with binary, differentiated higher education systems, where traditional universities exist side-by-side with more vocationally oriented institutions. Some countries have seen the emergence of new, vocationally oriented higher education approaches in the last 10– 15 years, such as Yrkeshögskolan (YH) in Sweden or the new developments in Slovenia shown in the box below.

In Germany, higher VET is usually completed after in-company vocational training and/or several years of employment and the majority of higher vocational training qualifications are assigned to level 6 on the German qualifications framework. A recently revised VET law includes the introduction of 'certified professional', 'bachelor professional' or 'master professional' degrees which provides for parity of esteem between VET and higher education, internationally understandable degrees and career mobility.

At the same time, between 2000 and 2017, whilst the number of people achieving academic qualifications enjoyed a major increase, achievements of higher VET qualifications remained largely unchanged, pointing to the need to raise the attractiveness of higher VET. This provides a good example of some of the challenges facing higher VET's development

The information provided here from Cedefop shows once again that it is necessary to start working with common concepts to identify which sectors there are, how they have their own character and

where there appears to be an overlap. For that overlap it is then necessary to take things apart, in order to get clear why there is a design in which two sectors have to work together in order to achieve the objectives of the relevant overlap. It means that an unclear situation does not contribute to what is necessary with the entire education system at level 5 and above to be able to serve the target groups.

**TT-1:** consult on the need to reach international agreements

**TT-2:** necessity at national level / good examples / criteria / differences in systems

**Example for HVET: Slovenia's new higher VET strategy**

Slovenia is adopting a national strategy for 2020–2030 on higher vocational colleges/ short-cycle higher education. Higher vocational colleges offer 2-year study programmes with 120 ECTS at level 6 in the national qualification framework SQF (equivalent to level 5 in the EQF/and short-cycle programmes as per the EHEA qualification framework). Programmes are based on labour market needs, and key to the programmes' success is the emphasis on WBL and apprenticeships, which constitute 40% of overall curricula (400 hours each study year). Programmes are accredited by a ministerial commission as well as subject to an external evaluation by the agency responsible for quality assurance in higher education.

In Slovenia it is an example of mixing two types of qualifications and looking for a strategy. It concerns HVET, here linked to Higher Vocational Colleges, so in principle no formal HE Institutions within the Bologna Process (also offering level 6 and higher).

The most interesting thing here is that the programmes have a double assessment, a formal *accreditation* on behalf of the Ministry when it comes to HVET and an *evaluation* by the organization responsible for the quality of the HE.

**TT-1:** Is there knowledge of this approach at an international level "/ is this an approach that also fits with the Bologna Process?

**TT-2:** What are the rights derived from this assessment, considering the differences between the accreditation as HVET and the evaluation by the HE Agency / what can we learn from this for other countries and how are the other systems in other countries to compare with this

**Example for HVET - Sweden – Higher vocational education: Yrkeshögskolan**

In Sweden, higher vocational education (HVE) has doubled since 2014. HVE is a post-secondary form of advanced vocational training (EQF levels 5 and 6), aimed at meeting labour market needs and designed and delivered in close cooperation with employers and industry. HVE is expanding quickly (from 25,000 full-time study places in 2014 to 50,000 in 2021) and also diversifying through the launch of shorter HVE programmes mainly aimed at the upskilling and reskilling of already skilled workers and a pilot scheme on 'flexible HVE' where recognition of previous learning is combined with HVE courses as a faster path to a HVE diploma.

The Swedish National Agency for HVE (NAHVE) is responsible for analysing the labour market demand for skills, for annual selection of programmes that qualify to be offered as HVE, for allocating government grants as well as for quality assurance and development.

Good to see that in Sweden this form of Higher VET has been given a firm place in the system. There is its own National Agency set up for this purpose, looking at the crucial facets for positioning the qualifications and training.

Incidentally, the translation of 'Yrkeshögskolan' via Google translate is: Universities of Applied Sciences... These are HEIs with a 'professional orientation'. This is partly due to the fact that Sweden does not have a binary system for HE in the formal setting. But there are (also) vocational study programmes at all levels within universities.

This means that there is room for institutes in Sweden that can be found in other countries with a formal binary system such as 'colleges, polytechnics, university colleges, universities of applied sciences, etc.'



It is therefore important in the coming discussions and consultations to make a distinction with regard to higher VET (VPE) for countries with and without formal binary higher education. This is also important because in countries with a unitary system there is room for institutions that offer qualifications parallel to the Universities and which can subsequently be seen by the national government as a form of 'higher education'. The fact that those qualifications do not in a formal sense part of the EHEA, so the Bologna Process, makes it difficult to explain everything.

In short, an additional reason to strive for more transparency, with clear sectors that are classified on the basis of the NQF and thus the EQF.

In general, it can be stated that only programs that meet all the requirements set for qualifications (cycles) within the EHEA can be counted as international higher education.

*A break by us: Again about an international common name for this type of qualifications*

Just an addition. This is the aspect that must therefore be considered in general, namely whether the name Higher Vocational Education is also used as such in both countries for the type of training or whether it has been chosen by Cedefop or another organization.

As is well known, it has been proposed within CHAIN5 to opt for a name that does not use 'higher' because there is also no Lower Education for Higher Education, and the wrong suggestion is thus evoked for VET op 5 and beyond.

In addition, it concerns courses that focus on the professional world of work, so that it concerns professional programmes. In several countries, there is only one translation for these programmes in the national language, while in English there are two options: vocational and professional. The first one is linked to VET and the second one can be found in HE. That is why it is proposed to use a combination name for the programmes on level 5 and higher: Vocational-Professional Education, to emphasize the orientation more strongly.

**TT-1:** Discussion about the common name / ditto about binary education / look at what the national EHEA is, seen from Europe / what is HE in the national context / research

**TT-2:** Identify the national situations / literal translation into English

## **2 The Challenges - Higher VET**

Naturally, the report also examines the challenges that exist when it comes to HVET within national education systems and the possibilities to consider at an international level how to boost the further development of this sector. Here the list as it is included in the report.

In general, across Europe a number of important challenges remain to be addressed, including:

1. how to strengthen the visibility and esteem of HVET, in light of the lack of transparency/focus of its role in the education system;
2. whether VET should strive to cover all EQF levels, even up to level 8;
3. whether higher VET should be developed inside existing higher education systems, or in separate institutions;
4. creating bridges between HVET and university level education in order to allow movement between the education forms, avoid overlap, increase validation, recognition of previous learning and shorten study paths;
5. the role companies and other stakeholders should play - e.g. 'ownership' of the higher VET 'system' or influencing individual programmes/curricula.

These challenges are clearly in line with what has also been indicated from our side. We have already made proposals for a number of them within CHAIN5. That is why we will use the TTs to determine the best approach to take further steps and to see which organizations can be approached. It makes sense to inform the European Commission and ask it to work with us on how to proceed.

*Just a good practice: Didactic Initiative of Excellence in Higher VET, Poland*

Since 2019, the Didactic Initiative of Excellence has aimed at improving the quality of practice-oriented profile of studies at public vocational higher education institutions in Poland. Based on

quality assurance assessments and tracking of graduates' labour market outcomes, vocational institutions selected under the initiative receive additional financial resources that can be spent on activities boosting their innovative capacity, such as modern teaching and learning methods and technologies. The excellence initiative further targets public vocational higher education institutions which are deemed to play a significant role in regional development. The project aims to increase the innovative potential of institutions by encouraging them to develop an action plan for modernizing teaching methods and competences of their staff and students.

### 3 Area, interesting for VET to contribute

Furthermore, here is a part of the report in which a number of focus areas are mentioned, with regard to being able to contribute to this as a VET sector - and then also with Higher VET (VPE). We will also take these examples further into the development of our plans.

Regarding the activities described in the preceding section that define features of vocational excellence, leading higher VET institutions are notable for their ability to integrate activities, especially research with teaching and learning (including the teaching of teachers/trainers) – building feedback loops between the two – and going beyond just sharing staff and facilities with businesses to helping VET students to set up their own businesses through incubators and innovation hubs.

Areas where higher VET's contribution is particularly noteworthy are included in the overview below.

#### 1. Promoting innovative, modern, creative business environments

##### *Latvia – business incubator at Riga State Technical School*

The Riga State Technical School (RSTS) has recently established their business incubator which allows the RSTS to support and promote an innovative, modern and creative business environment. The purpose of the business incubator is, in partnership with industry and higher education institutions, to develop excellence in VET, actively participate in skill forecasting and formulation of regional development needs and innovation strategies, as well as their implementation. Their mission is to stimulate industry professionals' engagement in the study processes, hands-on and work-based learning in companies, providing support and investment not only for young persons' careers and professional development, but also for adult continuing education, innovative and creative thinking and entrepreneurship. The business incubator's key role and activities include serving as:

1. an information platform for interdisciplinary cooperation and exchange of information with practitioners;
2. a communicative tool allowing employers to select prospective specialists through express interviews, as well as to present their companies and the specifics of their operations both in person and online;
3. a brainstorming platform for educators to improve their competence and innovation capacity;
4. a career start-up studio for students to pursue a professional career and further education, and;
5. a meeting point for promoting lifelong learning. The business incubator brings together students, educators, alumni, employers, researchers, project and cooperation partners, as well as other relevant professionals and stakeholders, including professionals from other educational institutions and universities.

#### 2. Embedding entrepreneurship in the curriculum

##### *Croatia – Strukovna škola Vice Vlatkovića*

In Croatia, Strukovna škola Vice Vlatkovića has been offering support and education in the digital and financial skills necessary for successful entrepreneurship through the project '(P)ostani-mo-financijsko i digitalnopismeni'. The school played a leading role in the project, which was implemented in five other institutions (three secondary schools and two adult learning institutes). The school is one of the 'experimental schools' within the 'School for Life' project (financed by the ESF). The project consists of testing new curriculum approaches from the perspective of their value and applicability on the market. It focuses on problem solving skills and increasing students' satisfaction from learning.



#### *Denmark – VIA University College*

VIA University College in Denmark was chosen by the Danish Foundation for Entrepreneurship as the most entrepreneurial institution of higher education of 2018. VIA works strategically with entrepreneurship and innovation in all of its 42 educational programmes, including programmes that are traditionally not focused on developing students in this area. In particular, VIA has put specific efforts into integrating entrepreneurship in the general curricula, and not as a separate activity, for more than 19,000 students.

Faculty members have been trained to teach courses in entrepreneurship and VIA offers special electives and courses on entrepreneurship. They have also established student entrepreneurship centres on most campuses. One specific goal is to enable more students to establish their own companies – which more and more students across programmes do. In addition, VIA participates in a number of EU-funded development projects in the area of student entrepreneurship and innovation. One hundred mentors have also been trained as part of VIA's vocational business educational programmes, which provide VET students with tailored career guidance.

### 3. Developing trans-national joint curricula

#### *Slovenia, Šolski Center Nova Gorica*

In Slovenia, the Šolski Center Nova Gorica is introducing innovative work-based learning models with personalised tutoring, as well as innovative work-related projects, within the framework of an Erasmus+ KA 3 project, RAY. Part of the project involves sharing the products through international mobility and a virtual campus. In addition, the BoQua project (European Qualification Concept 'Professional Career Specialist') aims to develop a new and Europe-wide uniform qualification concept for professionals who are active in the field of 'vocational orientation' (e.g. teachers, social pedagogues, professional advisers). The project's products should contribute to improving the quality of work in the field and make the experts' qualification and the implementation of vocational orientation at schools, consulting institutions, and within the framework of open youth work Europe-wide, more comparable.

## 4 Key-issues

Finally, you will find here a passage from the report concerning the so-called key issues. This mainly concerns positioning VET at higher levels around themes that lend themselves to setting up CoVEs and international cooperation.

It is therefore mainly about making it possible, seen from the perspective of CHAIN5, to exchange experiences and good examples. The role of the regional world of work is important in this, so it will also be necessary to look at what that role can be and how the cooperation can best and effectively be fulfilled.

The development of Centres of Vocational Excellence and VET at higher levels are two ways in which VET can act as beacons of excellence, building on VET's core strengths whilst taking it in new directions and engaging with a wider set of stakeholders to support environmental, social and economic goals.

Through Centres of Vocational Excellence, VET has the opportunity to become an essential and proactive element of skill ecosystems at regional level. This is by no means a straightforward task: it involves not simply doing the 'VET basics' well – matching provision closely to the needs of the labour market – but going further to look for innovations in all areas and embracing digitalisation at the core of teaching and learning activities.

VET at higher levels is increasingly needed to support the demand in the economy for higher-level skills. Indeed, more than that, higher-level VET is needed that can play a role in innovation and the growth of the business base, e.g. through incubators and innovation hubs.

Yet many countries lack an institutional framework to respond to this challenge and some key challenges remain, e.g. whether capacity should be developed alongside or within existing institutions, how to improve higher VET's profile, the extent of its coverage in terms of higher EQF levels, and the role of other stakeholders, especially employers.